

SOCIALISM AND THE NEGRO.

Chiefly through the efforts of Dr. Dubois, author of "The Souls of Black Folk," there came into being in the United States, some ten years ago, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. In the main, the organisation strove to combat the wide and insidious influence of Booker-Washington who, making light of the social and political status of his race, had put into practice, for its material benefit, the principle of work advocated by the latter-day Carlyle. A group of wealthy and, socially and politically, influential bourgeois of the North, helped to launch the movement and became its directing spirit.

In it were men and women representative of the old conservative and Quaker aristocracy of New England and Pennsylvania, and the liberal capitalists. It comprised intellectual and commercial Jews, and its finest spirit was Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of the *American Nation* and grandson of the great Abolitionist, who, vilified and denounced by the hide-bound capitalist press, stands out as the solitary and only consistent representative of the American bourgeoisie, counselling peace and moderation between aggressive Capitalism and its government, and Militant Labour and Socialism, and all the forces of passion struggling in America to-day. This group, palpably ignorant of the fact that the Negro question is primarily an economic problem, evidently thought it might be solved by admitting Negroes who have won to wealth and intellectual and other attainments into white society on equal terms, and by protesting and pleading to the political and aristocratic South to remove the notorious laws limiting the political and social status of coloured folk. So far as I am able to judge, it has done good work on the technical legal and educational side. It developed race-consciousness in the Negro and made him restive; but on the political side it has flirted with different parties and its work is quite ineffective.

Further, it has taken a firm stand against segregation, which is a moot and delicate question. While all Negroes are agreed that the social barriers must be removed, there is much difference in regard to education and some institutions like hospitals and churches. The growing numbers of cultured Negro men and women find it extremely difficult to obtain employment that is in keeping with their education under the capitalist system of government. For one instance, had a scholar like Dr. Dubois been white he would certainly have secured a chair at Harvard, Yale or Columbia University, for which he is eminently fitted. Many Negroes have obtained a sound education at great sacrifice, only to be forced, upon completion of their studies, into menial or uncongential toil. In the black belt of New York City, where there is an estimated population of 100,000 Negroes, the Police Force, hospital, library, and elementary schools—patronised chiefly by coloured people—are entirely manned by white staffs. It would be impossible for such conditions to exist under a soviet system of Government.

Just about the beginning of the late War the Socialists and I.W.W., realising that the Negro population offered a fertile field for propaganda, began working in earnest

among them. With the aid of the *Messenger Magazine*, edited by two ardent, young Negro university men, and *The Liberator*, they have done real constructive work that is now bearing fine fruit. The rank-and-file Negroes of America have been very responsive to the new truths. Some of them have been lured away by the siren call

of the American Federation of Labour to enter its ranks. For years this reactionary association held out against Negro membership, but recently the capitalist class, alarmed over the growth of revolutionary thought among the blacks, used its creature, Gompers, to put through a resolution admitting Negroes to membership at the last conference. It has, however, had no effect on the lily-white and inconsequential trade unions of the South.

A splendid result of the revolutionary propaganda work among the blacks was the Conference of the National Brotherhood of Workers of America (entirely Negro) which was held at Washington, D.C., in September of last year. Its platform is as revolutionary in principle as that of the I.W.W. Over 400 delegates were in attendance and the majority came from the South. As always, the coloured workers are ready and willing to meet the white workers half-way in order that they might unite in the fight against capitalism; but, owing to the seeds of hatred that have been sown for long years by the master class among both sections, the whites are still reluctant to take the step that would win the South over to Socialism. The black workers hold the key to the situation, but while they and the whites remain divided the reactionary South need not fear. The great task is to get both groups together. Coloured men from the North cannot be sent into the South for propaganda purposes, for they will be lynched. White men from the North will be beaten and, if they don't leave, they will also be lynched. A life here awaits coloured men. But the South is beautiful in its spirit of slavery. It

believes that it is the divinely-appointed guardian of sacred white womanhood, and it professes to disfranchise, outrage and lynch Negro men and women solely for the protection of white women.

It seems then that the only solution to the problem is to get lovely and refined white women volunteers to carry the mes-

sage of Socialism to both white and black workers. There are many of them in the movement who should be eager to go. During the period of Reconstruction a goodly number went from New England to educate the freed men, and, although they were socially ostracised by the Southerners, they stood to their guns. To-day they are needed more than ever. The call is louder and the cause is greater. Among the blacks they will be safe, respected and honoured. Will they rise to their duty?

Strangely, it is the professional class of Negroes that is chiefly opposed to Socialism, although it is the class that suffers and complains most bitterly. Dr. Dubois has flirted with the Socialist idea from a narrow, opportunist-racial standpoint; but he is in spirit opposed to it. If our Negro professionals are not blindly ignorant they should realise that there will never be any hope—no sound material place in the economic life of the world—for them until the Negro masses are industrially independent. Many coloured doctors, lawyers, journalists, teachers and preachers literally starve and are driven to the wall because the black working class does not earn enough to give them adequate support. Naturally, the white workers will hardly turn from their kind to coloured aspirants to the professions, even though the latter should possess exceptional ability. And even when they are capable they are often up against the prejudice of their own people who have been subtly taught by the white ruling class to despise the abilities of their race and regard as their enemies those who are more than their own kind.

During the War, the Coloured and White Indian Negro, went to New York and

formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and African Communities' League for the redemption of Negro Africa, and the return thither of Negroes in exile. The movement has had an astonishing success. Negroes from all parts of the world, oppressed by the capitalists, despised and denied a fighting chance under the present economic system by white workingmen, have hailed it as the star of hope, the ultimate solution of their history-old troubles. It now numbers over two million active members. The capitalist press which ridiculed it at first now mentions the Association in flattering terms, especially since it successfully floated the Black Star Line Steamship Company. At the beginning the company had much trouble with the local authorities, but it has never been persecuted by the State or Federal Government, for it is non-Socialistic, of course. Although an international Socialist, I am supporting the movement, for I believe that, for subject peoples, at least, Nationalism is the open door to Communism. Furthermore, I will try to bring this great army of awakened workers over to the finer system of Socialism. Some English Communists have remarked to me that they have no real sympathy for the Irish and Indian movement because it is nationalistic. But, to-day, the British Empire is the greatest obstacle to International Socialism, and any of its subjugated parts succeeding in breaking away from it would be helping the cause of World Communism. In these pregnant times no people who are strong enough to throw off an imperial yoke will tamely submit to a system of local capitalism. The breaking up of the British Empire must either begin at home or abroad; the sooner the strong blow is struck the better it will be for all Communists. Hence the English revolutionary workers should not be unduly concerned over the manner in which the attack should begin. Unless, like some British intellectuals, they are enamoured of the idea of a Socialist (?) British Empire! Unless they are willing to be provided with cheap raw materials by the slaves of Asia and Africa for the industries of their overcrowded cities, while the broad, fertile acres of Great Britain are held for hunting and other questionable pleasures.

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